

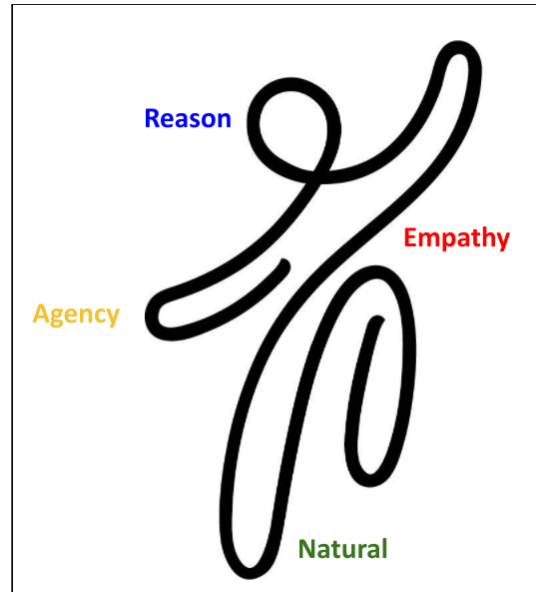
## Human nature, human potential

### 1) The feet: **natural origins**

#### Question: What are we?

'Humanists keep one foot on the ground.' They believe that the world is a natural place with no supernatural side, and trust the scientific explanation of our origins. We are a product of nature and what we are made from will return to the natural world after we are gone. We are material and mortal creatures. This is the one life we have.

However, humanists also have a cautiously optimistic understanding of our human **potential**. We have evolved particular natural capacities that can support us to answer questions, consider and care for others, and lead full and flourishing lives.



### 2) The head: **reason**

#### Question: How can we know what is true?

We are curious. We can ask questions and, in seeking answers, we are capable of using reason - thinking clearly, logically, and critically about our beliefs and about the claims of others. This has enabled us to develop the scientific approach to understanding, which has provided us with the most reliable way to answer questions about the world, to make progress in our knowledge, and to share in this collaborative endeavour. Humanists believe this approach gives our beliefs the best chance of being true.

### 3) The heart: **empathy**

#### Question: How do we know what is good?

We have the capacity to empathise with others, to imaginatively identify with them, and to consider the potential consequences of our actions upon them. We can recognise that, despite our differences, human beings have many shared needs, feelings, and values. We are capable of kindness and compassion. Empathy can help us to consider how we should treat other people, and why we should try to act in ways that support the wellbeing of human beings and other sentient life. Humanists believe that is how to be good.

### 4) The hands: **agency**

#### Question: How should we live?

We are agents. We can take action. We have the capacity to be the authors of our own lives and should not allow others to dictate how we must live. We are conscious creatures who can deliberate between options, can imagine alternatives, can make choices over how we act, can reflect on those choices, and can learn from each other. Humanists believe that this enables us to find happiness, and to give meaning and shape to our lives in the here and now.

## 5) Taking action

### Question: What kind of world do we want?

These natural capacities also place on us a **responsibility**. Humanists believe we should try to make a positive contribution towards building a better society. They do not believe that help will come from anywhere outside humanity. We should work for a world in which everyone has the opportunity to use their capacities to the full in the one life they have:

- A world in which we nurture and promote a scientific understanding of the world around us, and everyone has access to the riches of human knowledge through education
- A world in which we encourage kindness and concern for others, and support the welfare and fulfilment of human beings and other sentient animals
- A world in which everyone has the necessary freedoms, opportunities, and human rights to shape their own lives and find happiness in the here and now

Humanists celebrate our achievements and our progress towards a better society. However, their goals are not naive or blindly optimistic. They recognise that we are flawed creatures. We do not always use our capacities well. We often fail. A better world is not guaranteed. But, for humanists, it is possible.